



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Jewel Cave
National Monument

11149 US Hwy 16
Building B12
Custer, SD 57730
605-673-8300 phone
605-673-8397 fax

Jewel Cave National Monument News Release

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Contact: **Bradley Block / Chief of Interpretation / bradley_block@nps.gov**

Park Ranger Lydia Austin Honored as Outstanding New Interpreter

Custer – Lydia Austin, Seasonal Park Ranger at Jewel Cave National Monument, is the recipient of the 2012 Outstanding New Interpreter Award from the National Association for Interpretation (NAI). She was recognized at the Annual Interpreters Workshop in Hampton, Virginia, on Saturday, November 17.

The Outstanding New Interpreter Award is given to an individual that has worked less than five years in a full time position and demonstrates a recognized potential in interpretation. The individual also assumes leadership roles and may be actively engaged in creating unique programs or enhancing facility developments. Each year, NAI receives an assortment of nominations from various agencies and individuals across the country; however, only two nominees are awarded at the annual workshop.

The staff of Jewel Cave nominated Lydia in January 2012. With letters of support from nearby Custer State Park and Custer School District, Lydia's talent as a naturalist, environmental educator, exhibit designer, interpretive writer, and special event coordinator, were well conveyed. All of her past work experiences has included some form of outdoor education and conservation awareness, and she has mentored a number of youth within the Black Hills through hundreds of school programs. She has served as an array of characters on the Halloween Night Hike for Custer State Park. She was a program leader for Project WILD curriculum classes with teachers. She also crafted an assortment of publications for Jewel Cave, such as the Junior Ranger activity booklet, Venturing Scout Ranger materials, and a newly designed Wild Caving rack card. She also served as the point of contact for the former CHOICES Day Program through the Custer Middle School, linking teachers and students with the National Park Service.

Bradley Block, Chief of Interpretation, states, "Ranger Lydia has demonstrated a keen knowledge of the interpretive field and showcased some wonderful talent as a front-line interpreter for the Monument. She has been involved in a large number of creative program developments and has also become a vital resource for Jewel Cave in relation to enhanced publications, brochures, and activity books. We have been very fortunate to have her on our team."

Lydia earned a BA in biology from the University of Montana in Missoula in 2007. She began her interpretive career as a seasonal front-line naturalist at Custer State Park in 2005. She quickly became fascinated by the Black Hills and immersed herself within the profession of environmental interpretation and visitor services. Her seasonal experiences created a desire toward this permanent career path. Eventually, she moved to the Black Hills and worked at Custer State Park as a summer naturalist and a winter education specialist.

In 2009, Lydia joined the Interpretive Division at Jewel Cave. She assumed a passion for the cave resource and worked herself into a variety of leadership roles. Most impressive is her diligence toward the Wild Caving Tour, helping train new staff and enhancing the programs' interpretive themes. Rather than a simple recreational experience, Lydia transformed the tour into an interpretive adventure that stresses the human ideals of exploration

Over

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and discovery. Tour participants depart from the Monument with a better sense of cave stewardship and a heightened respect for the preservation and protection goals of the National Park Service.

Lydia is currently enrolled in several online courses through the Eppley Training Center of the University of Indiana. The courses are designed for public land management professionals and have the intent of enhancing program presentations through a nationwide coaching network. She is also pursuing her Master's Certificate in Wilderness Management through the University of Montana. Lydia is currently working the winter season as a Park Ranger at Mount Rushmore National Memorial.



Seasonal Park Ranger Lydia Austin of Jewel Cave National Monument is the 2012 recipient of the Outstanding New Interpreter Award.

NPS

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